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THE INSTITUTIONAL SCHOOL¹

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By the advocacy of an institutional school system I mean a movement toward the greater use of our elaborate and expensive school buildings, so that they shall become more and more a center of social activities, where the young people can have an opportunity to acquire, in connection with the school, those moral qualities and manual attainments which are so necessary to good citizenship, and in many of which we find our youth so painfully deficient since the passing of the old-time chores with their attendant responsibilities. It is a fact that the modern child has drawn away from his share in the community of the family, and to the detriment of both. This has been the result of an involuntary change in conditions, and it has affected particularly the boys; for the girls in a normal home have opportunity and occasion to be employed today as much as ever under the supervision of their mothers, whereas, for the boys there is as yet nothing to take the place of the old wood-pile, of the well-curb, and the small "place" where there was an opportunity for him to develop morally, socially, and manually, under the oversight of a watchful father. The passing of these conditions has brought about the result that although our boys today may be safely said to be equipped with harder heads, more logical brains, and better balanced judgment than their ancestors at the same age, yet they are far behind those old-time boys in the capacities and development of what comes from the heart and the hand.

There is no use in regretting the passing of these old conditions. The "good old times" were all right in their way; but they are never wished back by anyone who is awake to the

¹ Read at the annual meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Association, March, 1909.

demands of the present. When the old days of chivalry passed, standing as they did for truth, nobility, religion, and good breeding, probably the mediaeval knights felt sure that these virtues were doomed to decay at the rise of the cities and under the sway of those newly born elements of commerce, with its horribly materialistic tendencies. And yet we, who look back upon that time, know that it marked a tremendous advance in universal culture. It meant the spreading of civilizing influences among the whole people rather than confining them to a class. Likewise, there was nothing essential, nothing intrinsic, in those old chores, apart from the valuable lessons which they taught; and it is for us now to find other means to gain the same ends. Let us, however, first take a glance at those fundamental elements in the training of character, and we shall find revealed an unexpected richness and variety. We recognize these qualities largely by their absence in the makeup of the children of today. The most important ones are so evident that they do not need discussion: the willingness to assume responsibility, regularity, reverence, obedience, humility—I doubt if children find that word in the dictionary today—respect for elders (to say nothing of the way in which this might be expressed in good manners toward them), dexterity, ingenuity, and clever handiness. There is also lacking the conviction that certain things must be done with care and thoroughness. Is it not in the boy's mind today that it is a mark of smartness to get around a duty rather than to do it. Isn't he impressed with the feeling that his doing a thing depends largely upon whether he wants to do it rather than upon its necessity; and that to wheedle a person is a more desirable aim than to obey him? This gives the boys a false conception of the relations of life. They look for a "snap." They aim at some shrewd bargain with the responsibilities of life. And do we not help them along a bit in that idea when we tell them that work is really play if it is only made interesting? Another thing they used to get: an idea of the inviolable laws of Nature, which taught them accuracy. A thing was done or not done. In splitting rails Abraham Lincoln learned to know when a job was finished and well done. When we deal with inanimate things, we cannot

wheedle them. Recently, at a meeting of the Masters' Club, in Boston, I was asked what it is that we notice particularly as lacking among college students, when they come from the hands of the high school. I replied that first and foremost there is a certain vagueness in their own minds as to what they do know, and as to their own powers. They don't know whether they know their lesson or not; and our teachers in schools today are very largely employed in trying to convince the scholars that they don't know their lessons, rather than in spending the valuable time in drilling them or in teaching them something on an accepted foundation.

Again, in the help which the children gave in the family duties and cares, they acquired that feeling of responsibility which made them appreciate the purposes and the machinery of life. Today the child, not the welfare of the family, is the center of observation, thought, and planning. That provides for the child a very weak motive for activity. You can't easily create in a child's heart an impulse to improve himself. We know in schools that the greatest inducement which we can give to a child is to allow him to help about something; even the smallest children are anxious to help. It is an inborn impulse to help other people; but the child at that age, much to our disgust, doesn't usually care for his own improvement. We have to implore the children to do something which is for their good. In old times they were thankful to have a chance to go to school to learn. They were grateful for opportunities. I think that word also has about died out. Even in their play they are *blasé*. You have to tease them to come out to play, and the manager of the team begs them to appear to practice for team-work. They haven't earned their play; they haven't earned that opportunity; and it palls upon them like inherited wealth. In old times, the regular attention to certain duties; the sense of order and law; the tonic which they took regularly in doing hard tasks; and that self-control that came from the dealing with animate animals and with inanimate objects; the variety of methods which they devised when the cow got out, or when the wheelbarrow broke down, or when the hen-yard needed fixing: all those things developed

in the children of the previous generation an individuality of expression which was immensely valuable from a merely mental point of view. Now, that is replaced by the demand for immediate attention on the part of some workman to fix up the tennis court, to repair the football; and someone hurries to do it, for fear the boys shall lose their interest in this healthful play which is so good for them! Only a few weeks ago, to my knowledge, two hockey teams came together to play. Twenty-three young fellows stood around and had no game because no one had cleared the snow from the ice!

Again, in old times, there was a disclosure of weaknesses—the bad points in a boy's nature came out and were corrected. Working around the place under the eye of the father was a great corrective of faults and weaknesses. Many a lie that was told about letting the bars down, or locking the stable was threshed—I might say thrashed—out. Today the parents don't know whether the boy tells the truth or not. They haven't that intimate acquaintance with their children. Many parents do honestly think that their children are about perfect. And those children are growing up with moral adenoids which have not been discovered. In still another way we are at an enormous disadvantage today in trying to place boys who leave school at the legal age. We don't know what to do with them. Being busy at home up to that age had formerly brought out many an inclination on the part of a boy to this or that trade. Now, he not only doesn't know any handiwork, but he doesn't know what he would like to do. And in the absence of apprenticeship, a boy that might have made a first-class mechanic now wanders around from one job to another with an enormous waste of economic industry, and there is danger of his finally drifting into the ranks of vagrancy. It is no wonder that labor-union leaders have such power, when additions to the ranks of the workmen today come largely from such floaters. Is there not, then, an evident duty here for us to provide some opportunity for boys to learn the lessons of life, together with the lessons which they are learning at school? A very prominent and successful business man told me the other day that it was not neces-

sary now-a-days for a boy to wait for "pull." Many large business enterprises, all department stores are waiting, he said, for any good boys who will come to them. Ah! he put in the word "good" boys. Yes, those boys that have these virtues and are of the right kind will be taken and put ahead; but my sympathies are with those boys who would be good boys if they had training

Now where shall we inculcate those virtues that are not inborn? What we want is something that will supply to the boys some means of moral, manual, and social education. There have been some attempts at an "institutional church" for adults. I presume the reason that they have not succeeded is the fear of the religious atmosphere connected with them, and of the theological or sectarian influence. But it is something similar to that, that I mean by the institutional school where boys can spend a good deal of their time outside of school hours. This is a possibility which has yet been untried about here. In some western cities and some cities of New York it has been very successful. And I don't mean it as a charity, nor for the poor boys in the cities, nor for the immigrant boys—I am not after them today—it is the boys of the moderately well-to-do families, to whom it may be a center of economic and social activities, for the young as well as for the older people in the evening. We might have connected with the school building a school garden, or even a farm, with a swimming-pool in the summer, a school kitchen, a school library and reading-room, a school club with lectures from time to time, and, above all, some civic organization where the young people could find what they are unconsciously waiting for at the present time, a place where each can learn to develop by properly training his own best powers.

We have, however, to contend with the blindness of the stereotyped system which is upon us, especially from the colleges who are so heedless of the boy's welfare during his preparatory years. Under the plea of enriching a grammar-school curriculum we have the most preposterous requirements for admission to college, and they are constantly growing worse.

Preposterous they are for any boys who expect to do anything else than get ready for college. Other normal activities of the boys during their grammar-school and high-school years are stifled, throttled, crushed out! And the same pressure works downward and squeezes the life of the lower schools, so that in the compulsive grind today, a boy rarely feels that his soul is his own. He rarely has the chance to express himself in initiative and in spontaneity, two great qualities which enter into good citizenship. We are so forced to get the children ready for promotion, that fetish of the teachers and bugbear of the scholars and parents, that we lose sight altogether of the children, as children. Teachers are in such a hurry to have them learn certain things that must be known, that the way they go about to learn them and the development of their powers, are overlooked in the haste to get certain results. We attend so much today to the things that are to be taught that we leave out of consideration the child as a human being, who should be trained and educated and developed in the highest sense. The result is alike detrimental to the college graduate and the boy who leaves school at fifteen. If the latter is of the right kind he will start ahead, will rise in business. If he is not, he will dumbly and stupidly submit. But it is the college graduate that wakens later and at a more hopeless period of his life. Unless a college graduate today enters a learned or scientific profession, he must, as we know, start all over again. Whether he goes into banking, railroading, sheep raising, or politics, he must begin at the bottom; for he has never learned anything except how to study from books. He is helpless in life and in the world, strenuous as it is today in competition.

Now, this is not due to faults in the college curriculum, so much as to his previous unnatural boyhood. He gave up and sacrificed the knowledge of the world of life in order to get ready for college. When the girls of today make up their minds to go through the high school and college, they might as well take the veil at once for all they will have time to look into domestic affairs or to understand the real life of the family and of true social relations. Unless she continues to live at home,

she gradually withdraws from the relations of the family and is in great danger of being estranged from them forever. In old times here at Harvard, the students left for the winter term to go out somewhere to teach. A hardship? No, it would be the best thing that could happen to the boys of today, if they were forced to leave for a term and go out to work a while and meet the world. In the same way, some of the women's colleges are discussing the question of advising students to leave at the end of the sophomore year for the sake of spending some time at home between their sophomore and junior years. We must settle this matter by beginning with the grammar schools and refusing to crush out the normal activities of our boys and girls for an idea. We must determine to develop them practically in an all-around fashion. They will still want to go to college. But they must not be forced up in this narrow mold which excludes a normal expansion of the heart and expression of the hand in social and dextrous activities.

Side by side with their work in getting ready for college there should be these avocations, so to speak, which shall be broadly making every period of their life more and more liberal. Thirty years ago the educational world was shocked because it was thought possible to obtain an A.B. degree without Greek. The educational world needs a few more shocks in order to learn what a liberal education really means. In Germany, for instance, it strikes an American very strangely that a forester should, with his diploma, stand side by side with a graduate from the university. I have heard Americans say, "How absurd! He is nothing but a wood chopper, is he?" We are beginning to see now that it will take the best possible brains in this country to save our forests. And it isn't merely those brains that go through college and graduate. It is those that in their boyhood had certain boyish experiences. It depends on whether, as boys, they had all these little activities of their hands and head and heart developed or suppressed. I am sure that brains, together with boys' experiences, must today be used along very many lines in best developing our national resources.

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Just one more point. The community must make a conscious voluntary effort under these new conditions, and not leave the school in its present form to do what it cannot do alone. The community must make these palatial buildings count as much, in proportion, as did the old red schoolhouse, in helping to make the most intelligent citizens, the most effective workmen, and the truest men. The family, the school, and the community must work together to develop the best qualities in each individual. This is a stupendous task, but I believe the life of the American democracy depends upon it; and it must be done at once.

Now, these propositions may sound well and we perhaps believe them for the moment. But who is going to carry them out? I haven't elaborated them much from the constructive point of view; for the body of people in a given locality must first see danger in present conditions, and take steps to introduce better. Each community will then work out its own problem and the best will prevail. To this body of American voters, then, we must look; for we don't live under the convenient paternalism of a patriarchal, feudal, or monarchial system. Nor is it the function of the ministers of education, nor clubs, nor associations to carry out these things. The responsibility is on the whole tax-paying community. We don't urge these things for charity; not at all. It is for self-preservation. We don't ask for elaborate equipments, for playgrounds which shall merely provide amusement for the boys. It is a matter of serious and vital importance. Our ancestors had strong convictions and they accomplished something. Our convictions today are not deep enough. We leave too much passively to the newspapers, to be thoroughly aroused. Germany has seen the vision and is stepping forward. England is slow to see the day of her salvation and is in danger of retrograding. France has become somewhat inert and is standing still. And shall America forfeit her birth-right and her heritage, and be blinded by money-getting, or be crippled by that spirit which throws onto someone else's shoulders the responsibility of carrying out reforms?